

Press Releases: Secretary Tillerson's Phone Call With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
January 24, 2018

The following is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke Wednesday, January 24, by phone.

They discussed issues and concerns related to Syria, North Korea, and Ukraine. On Syria, the two discussed Russia's role in ensuring the Assad regime plays a constructive role in the UN-led Geneva process. On North Korea, Secretary Tillerson discussed the meeting he hosted with Canadian Foreign Minister Freeland in Vancouver to call out North Korea's unlawful and dangerous development of nuclear and ballistic missile programs and stressed the urgent need for all parties to implement UNSCRs related to North Korea. On Ukraine, the Secretary noted the upcoming meeting between U.S. Special Representative Volker and Russian Representative Surkov and emphasized the need for Russia to accelerate implementation of its commitments under the Minsk Agreements and reverse the recent escalation in the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

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[Press Releases: Australia National Day](#)

Press Statement
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
January 24, 2018

On behalf of President Trump and the people of the United States, I am thrilled to congratulate the people of Australia as you celebrate Australia Day on January 26, 2018.

The United States and Australia share deep bonds of friendship that are truly unique. Our alliance is a stabilizing force in the region and beyond that has provided for our mutual security and prosperity. Our ties continue to strengthen as business, scientific, and cultural connections flourish. The United States remains committed to our unbreakable alliance and our powerful bonds of friendship and mateship, based on shared values and shared aspirations for the future.

As you celebrate Australia Day, know that the people of the United States celebrate with you as your friend, partner, and ally.

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[Press Releases: Democratic Republic of Congo: Government Repression and](#)

Violence Against Peaceful Protesters

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
January 23, 2018

We condemn in the strongest terms the violence perpetrated by DRC security forces on January 21 against church-led peaceful protests that resulted in at least six confirmed deaths, dozens of injuries, and numerous arbitrary arrests.

We are appalled that the DRC government, including President Kabila, would employ repressive tactics and disproportionate use of lethal force against civilians – including religious leaders and children – exercising their democratic rights to call for credible and inclusive elections.

We are deeply concerned that the DRC government's January 21 violence and repression against its citizens follows just weeks after the government's attacks on peaceful protesters on December 31 which the United States and members of the United Nations Security Council condemned and called for accountability.

The use of lethal force against Congolese citizens, and the cutting of internet and SMS service, undermine the democratic process, obstruct implementation of the St. Sylvestre Accord and contravene international human rights norms.

We call on President Kabila to hold accountable security force members who fired on civilians or ordered the use of lethal force and urge him and his government to ensure a peaceful and open electoral process so that credible elections are held as scheduled in December 2018.

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Press Releases: Remarks on Russia's Responsibility for the Ongoing Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Paris, France

January 23, 2018

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Again, I want to thank Foreign Minister Le Drian for hosting today's signing ceremony for the launch of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

This meeting was about two things: stopping chemical weapons attacks and denying impunity to those who use or enable the use of such weapons. For an indication of what these weapons can do to humans, one need look no further than East Ghouta in Syria. Only yesterday more than 20 civilians, most of them children, were victims of an apparent chlorine gas attack.

The recent attacks in East Ghouta raise serious concerns that Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime may be continuing its use of chemical weapons against its own people. Whoever conducted the attacks, Russia ultimately bears responsibility for the victims in East Ghouta and countless other Syrians targeted with chemical weapons since Russia became involved in Syria.

In September 2013, Russia pressed for, negotiated and agreed to the framework for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons – a diplomatic understanding between the United States and Russia requiring the verifiable destruction of Syria's entire chemical weapons stockpile.

In so doing, Russia assumed responsibility as guarantor for ensuring that its Syrian allies cease all use of chemical weapons and fully declare its chemical weapons stockpile for destruction under international oversight.

The U.S.-Russia diplomatic framework was legally anchored by the United States and Russia in a decision of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Resolution 2118 of the UN

Security Council.

In addition, in March 2015, Russia supported the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2209, which emphasized that those responsible for the use of any toxic chemical as a weapon, including chlorine, must be held to account.

Russia has not lived up to these commitments. Since two thousand – April 2014, there has been mounting evidence that Syria continues to illicitly possess chemical weapons and use them against its own people.

The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission has confirmed multiple incidents of chemical weapons use in Syria, including the use of the toxic industrial chemical chlorine as a weapon. Some of these incidents, including the April 4th sarin attack, were later attributed to Syria by the OPCW UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, an independent panel of impartial experts established in August 2015 by the UN Security Council's Resolution 2235, with the full support of Russia.

There is simply no denying that Russia, by shielding its Syrian ally, has breached its commitments to the United States as a framework guarantor. It has betrayed the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2218^[1], and on these occasions has twice^[2] vetoed UN Security Council resolutions to enforce the Joint Investigative Mechanism and continue its mandate.

Russia's failure to resolve the chemical weapons issue in Syria calls into question its relevance to the resolution to the overall crisis. At a bare minimum, Russia must stop vetoing and at least abstain from future Security Council votes on this issue.

Over 25 like-minded countries are here today to ensure that those who use chemical weapons will be held accountable. France, the UK, Germany, Turkey, and many others are here today to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention and its vision of a world free of these heinous weapons.

We will use this Partnership to facilitate greater information sharing about chemical weapons use, including sanctions information to collect and preserve such information and to strengthen the capacity of states to hold responsible parties accountable. This initiative puts those who ordered and carried out chemical weapons attacks on notice. You will face a day of reckoning for your crimes against humanity and your victims will see justice done.

We call on the community of responsible and civilized nations to put the use of chemical weapons to an end. The choice is yours. The people of East Ghouta are watching and the rest of the world is watching as well.

Thank you.

[1] UN Security Council Resolution 2118

[2] Russia has vetoed these UNSC enforcement resolutions three times

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Press Releases: International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
January 23, 2018

The international community is at a critical juncture in the fight to uphold the international norm against chemical weapons use. Repeated obstruction by some countries at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations have undermined the ability of the international community to hold accountable those who use chemical weapons.

The “International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons,” initiated by France, represents a political commitment by participating countries to hold to account those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. Countering weapons of mass destruction is a priority reflected in the new U.S. National Security Strategy. The Secretary of State’s participation in the January 23, 2018 Partnership launching conference illustrates the importance that the United States places to hold accountable those involved in the use of chemical weapons.

The Partnership supports and complements existing organizations and mechanisms, including the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü’s participation in the launch reinforces this message of

support.

The Partnership

Participating States will work together in six core areas, as stated by its Declaration of Principles:

- Collecting, compiling, retaining, and preserving relevant information to support efforts to hold accountable those responsible for the proliferation or use of chemical weapons;
- Facilitating the sharing of such information with Participating States and international or regional organizations, so that those responsible may be brought to justice;
- Using relevant mechanisms to designate individuals, entities, groups, and governments involved in the proliferation or use of chemical weapons for sanctions;
- Publicizing the names of individuals, entities, groups or governments placed under sanctions for their involvement in the proliferation or use of chemical weapons through a dedicated website;
- Strengthening the capacity of Participating States to hold accountable those involved in the use of chemical weapons, including by enhancing States' legal and operational capabilities to identify and sanction or prosecute individuals involved in the proliferation or use of chemical weapons; and
- Supporting, where appropriate, common positions in existing fora regarding the use of chemical weapons, for example, the OPCW Executive Council and the UN Security Council and General Assembly.

Over 25 countries signed on to the Declaration of Principles on January 23, 2018. Additional countries are welcome to join the Partnership, as long as they agree to the Declaration of Principles and Terms of Reference.

Additional information on the Partnership can be found at:

www.noimpunitychemicalweapons.org.

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